



NATIONAL CABLE & TELECOMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION

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The Honorable Michael J. Copps
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Commissioner Copps:

I read with great interest your recent op-ed piece in The New York Times concerning the broadcast media's lack of coverage of the two national political conventions, the 2004 presidential race and local election races. As you point out, broadcasters have been given the right to use the public airwaves for free in exchange for their agreement to broadcast in the public interest. Yet they have abandoned most live convention coverage and provide less and less coverage of the presidential election and local political races.

But as broadcast coverage has steadily declined, cable has taken up the mantle and become a leading source of political and public affairs programming at the federal, state and local level. National cable news networks, such as CNN, MSNBC, CNBC, and FoxNews, have stepped up to provide complete primary, convention, and election reporting. C-SPAN, the cable industry-funded non-profit and commercial-free public affairs network, has devoted thousands of hours to election coverage, including live gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Democratic and Republican conventions, presidential race events and issue analysis, and weekly series such as "Road to the White House." C-SPAN 2 has nightly provided archival footage of national political convention speeches dating from 1948 – 2000.

In addition to national cable networks, there are now more than 30 regional and local cable news channels across the country with a major focus on political news, ranging from New England Cable News (six New England states) to Bay News 9 (Florida) to ChicagoLand Television News (Illinois) to Ohio News Network to Northwest Cable News (Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska). Moreover, over 15 state public affairs networks have sprung up on cable, providing state legislative, agency and government proceedings, election events, and other public affairs programming. The regional and local news and public affairs networks combined serve over 50 million cable customers nationwide.

In light of this remarkable story, I was surprised at your statement that the American public should not look for local campaign coverage on cable, except in the few towns where

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local cable news exists, and that most Americans still must look to their local broadcasters for news of local campaigns and issues. This is far from the case. As an April 2004 study by the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation (RTNDF) reported, since their inception, cable's local and regional news channels "have been the places viewers turn to during the campaign season, on election night and in the months in between when they want frequent, in-depth political coverage." Indeed, as the report points out, local and regional news channels were created with politics in mind.

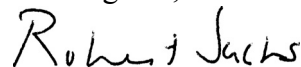
You also observed that even with the presence of national cable news networks around 35 million Americans do not get cable. However, millions of Americans receive satellite-delivered channels not only on cable but on DBS and other multi-channel video providers. Accordingly, 12.5 million households out of a total 106.7 television households actually do not subscribe to a multi-channel video programming service and do not receive national or regional cable news networks.

Nevertheless, you are rightfully concerned that even 12.5 million households that rely solely on broadcast television are not receiving sufficient news and information about the election and the two national political conventions. The government has given broadcasters free digital spectrum to provide video programming, including yet-to-be developed multicast services. It is ironic that broadcasters are pushing for more expansive must carry obligations for their digital signals on cable when they have largely abdicated their public interest obligations with respect to coverage of national and local political elections on their primary video channel.

The cable industry has invested millions upon millions of dollars to develop local and regional news channels and continues to be at the forefront in developing innovative news offerings. For example, several MSOs, including Cablevision, Comcast, Cox and Time Warner made speeches from the recent national conventions available to cable customers the day after they were made on their video-on-demand services. The same service will be provided for the presidential debates.

I look forward to the opportunity to share more with you about the cable industry's important role in providing the American public with greater access to news and information.

Best regards,



Robert Sachs
President & CEO

cc: Chairman Michael K. Powell
Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Commissioner Kevin J. Martin